

A
LETTER
ON
W O O L.

Price SIX-PENCE.



A
LETTER,
ON
THE SUBJECT OF
WOOL,
INTERSPERSED WITH
REMARKS ON COTTON,
ADDRESSED TO THE
PUBLIC AT LARGE;
BUT MORE PARTICULARLY TO
The COMMITTEE of
MERCHANTS *and* MANUFACTURERS
AT LEEDS;

By WM. MUGLISTON,
A MANUFACTURER of HOSIERY at ALFRETON.

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12

W. Musgrave.

*The reader of this little production is desired
not to expect a perfect methodical piece;--
what is here offered being only intended
as HINTS to an abler hand.*



A
LETTER
ON
WOOL,
WITH
REMARKS ON COTTON,

GENTLEMEN,

I Have seen your advertisement in the LONDON Papers, and agree with the principal of your resolves.—Tho' the concluding part does not amount to an invitation, it is nearly equal to one, and signifies, that any person or bodies of men who choole to correspond with the Committee, may address their letters to your clerk; on which account I venture to write to you, and I hope the correspondence of so diminutive a person as myself will not be deemed a presumption.

The Wool Trade is become a subject of the highest importance, and worthy the pen of the ablest writer; such a one* says an anonymous writer in a London paper, has exercised himself upon it; and he observes, "the remarks of a person so eminent in the literary world, must of course have uncommon weight"—a remark that I do not altogether agree with. A man may be very famous for his knowledge of literature, and write in a masterly stile,—may be well read in the classicks,—may understand poetry, history,

* Sir JOHN DALRYMPLE.—The Author does not mean the most distant reflection on the Hon. Baronet, all he would infer is, "That manufactures require a knowledge different from literature—EXPERIENCE." Theory and practice being widely different, and many things appear pretty in speculation, which are not reduceable to practice.

astronomy, and philosophy, and yet be out of his element in TRADE*.—And on the other side, a strictly impartial piece will be as difficult to expect from a tradesman who may have his prejudices. Every one knows how difficult it is for a man to be divested of SELF. But however, by reading the arguments made use of by both, a tolerable good judgment may be formed, by a disinterested person. I will confess, as a MANUFACTURER, *I may have my prejudices*, tho' I hope, if any, they are on the side of the nation.

I think no person who truly considers it's interest can have a doubt, but EXPORTING WOOL IN IT'S RAW STATE must, certainly, be prejudicial to *trade*: to send it UNWROUGHT to those people who are now customers for wrought goods, must certainly lessen the demand, unless we could suppose the consumption would be increased, which I can see no proof of. If they can have wool in such quantities as to answer their whole consumption, they will buy no manufactur'd goods; or if in less quantities, will only purchase so much woollens as are needfull to help out their own manufactory. All the world knows, by our having the *wool* of our own growth, we are as it were MONOPOLIZERS of some sort of woollens, which used to be consider'd formerly as our STAPLE COMMODITY; but alas by the alteration of times, the variation of fashions, and the ill-founded policy of late years, another branch of business has succeeded it,—but of this more by and by. If our wool is exported, the advantage bestowed on us by nature and providence is gone, and we shall not be upon a par with

* There is hardly any subject on which persons fancy themselves so able to judge as trade; but it is here as in any thing else. Those judge most rashly and positively who have the least knowledge. Before a man can pretend to decide absolutely upon trade in general, or any particular branch, or any ALTERATION in any particular branch: how much is it necessary for him to know and what a large stock of experience is needful to have?

From THOUGHTS ON MACHINES, &c.
And the Piceptor says, "The subject of manufactures is one of the most difficult that can be undertaken."

other nations who have no wool; for it is well known the inhabitants of many others live, work, and navigate for much less than the English; and hence, by having our wool in such quantities as they may want, will not only be able to supply themselves, but likewise their neighbours; and thus take our foreign markets from us.

“ The more markets our neighbours supply with woollens, by means of our wool, says the author of a pamphlet (a fragment of which, without either beginning or end, by whom, and when wrote, I cannot tell, has been put into my hands by a friend) the less woollens we must export. The reason is, because there is a certain and determined quantity of cloth consumed by the trading world*; whence it must necessarily follow, that so much *wool* as they receive from us, so much less *woollens* we ourselves shall export, and consequently the price of *wool* remain the same, as if the prohibitory laws were repeal’d. Upon repealing the laws that prohibit the exportation of *wool*, we give up and surrender to our neighbours, what we were once so famous for, and bid adieu to the exportation of *woollens*†; they will necessarily undersell and beat us out of trade, it being a great mistake to imagine that the exportation of wool and woollens may consist together, and as great a mistake to suppose that the pretended increase of the rates of *wool* may balance the mischief.”—Such a measure might be of present benefit to the grower, and occasion a present demand for wool; but what is to become of the MANUFACTURERS, who form by far the most numerous part of the *community*? The common carders, spinners, weavers, dyers, carriers, merchants, &c. whose wages are paid, and whose families are maintained, to

* “ This is rather a narrow idea, but if there is not a precise quantity beyond which there is no demand, yet the principal argument will hold good. It may be observed, by bringing goods cheaper to market we open new markets and get new customers; but is exporting our raw materials the way to do it?

† By woollens is meant the whole manufactured wool.

the great emolument of the State, which draws an immense revenue in time of peace from the woollen manufacture: nor is this all; it is our CASH to purchase the productions of foreign nations, for which, if we are driven from our principal and staple manufacture, we must pay more money; the wool itself not being equal to a tenth part of what is imported for woollens; every one knows, that is concerned in the manufacture, that labour exceeds the first cost many times, and *all that* must be so much clear gain to the nation. A single pack of fine wool (says E. Chambers F. R. S. in his universal dictionary) employs (it is computed) 63 persons a week, made up into cloth. A pack of large combing wool, 202 persons, whose wages amounts to 43l. 10s. A pack made up into stockings will employ 184 persons, who will earn 36l. and these calculations I am persuaded are not exaggerated.—England is said to produce 900,000 packs a year, of which, if $\frac{1}{3}$ only is exported unwrought, it will in all probability, deprive three millions (too many, says the author of the pamphlet, if one half) of employment. By exporting our wool, our manufactory in that line will be confin'd to our home consumption, which if the present rage for cotton goods continues, will soon be very small: how far it can be deemed good policy to employ all our ingenuity in manufacturing a foreign article, let our wise governors determine; when at the same time, we have such plenty of materials of our own growth. Of late the cloathing of both sexes has been chiefly cotton; and to see their dresses one would suppose it was the product of this kingdom. The consumption of cotton, occasioned by the numerous machines erected all over the country, has more than doubled it's price; and I am afraid indeed, great part of what is added to that, is taken from the labour. A very honest way of impoverishing ourselves, to enrich perhaps even our enemies.

The machines for preparing cotton yarn, however ingenious the construction, have certainly, *greatly hurt* the

wool

wool trade; and, in the article of stockings only, lessened the consumption of it many thousand packs a year. Formerly, a soft-woolled-maker was a respectable kind of business, and numbers of them resided in the three Counties of Leicester, Derby, and Nottingham: but now, that branch of business is almost dwindled away, to the great loss of the poor women employed in spinning, tho' I am much mistaken if a change will not soon come, especially if the present high price of cotton continue, of which there seems more than a probability; for the proprietors of large works, will naturally monopolize it. Of the utility of machines to shorten labour, much has been said, as well as on the other side, but time will discover which are right. For my own part I judge, that every invention, which requires a hand * to work it, diffuses it's benefit more generally, than such as go by wind or water. The profit of the latter centers with the proprietor only. An author in favour of the latter observes very candidly "that the chief, and perhaps the only, speculative difficulty concerning the use of them is, to know when and in what circumstances to introduce them; that men's natural powers may go as far as they can, and receive assistance gradually as they stand in need;" but mankind rarely knows when to stop, and there is hardly any keeping such things within proper bounds. An avaricious mind will grasp at all the world.

That numbers of industrious families, have been deprived of their employment in Lancashire and elsewhere by the cotton-mills lately erected, is a melancholy truth, and poverty is staring many in the face, who were wont to find a competency. That introducing the cotton in such quantities has been one means of reducing *wool*, nobody will deny. But other things may have helped. The cursed war in America must have had a fatal tendency to lessen our export

* A work-man, or work-woman.

trade in every line, and the loss of that to the revolted Colonies is only a part. We are thro' their means at war with other customers, with France, Spain, and Holland. War is a considerable clog upon commerce; the hazard of conveying goods abroad is thereby rendered great and dangerous, insurance high; all which damps the spirit of enterprize. But we all hope the evil is only temporary.

Inclosing our commons and forests has been another cause. Whether inclosing is upon the whole beneficial or prejudicial to the nation I do not think myself qualified to judge upon. All I have to say is, that the *wool trade* has been greatly hurt thereby, tho' perhaps not so sensibly felt, till the Spanish war, because the deficiency was amply supplied from Spain, tho' nobody will dispute but it might have been better to have grown it at home.

That inclosing has hurt the wool trade may appear a mystery to many, who do not know, that it has been the means of larger wool being grown. However it is a truth (at least in my neighbourhood); for where the commons have been taken in, the farmers have taken the sheep into their pastures, which they have found their account in, for the weight has been above double; hence so much coarser, which has in part supplied the place of, and been preferred to, so much Lincolnshire being long enough to comb and finer haired. I have known many farmers, even before those about them had enclosed practise this method, as more advantageous upon the whole than running them on the commons; and those now kept on them are much larger than formerly.

The merchant and manufacturer have not of late that difference they ought, between fine wool and coarse, and hence the farmer had no inducement to breed little sheep because the fleeces weighed so light, and perhaps only sold for one or two shillings a stone more than that which was of twice or three times the weight. That there has been no over stock of fine cloathing every dealer knows; and indeed has been evinced

evinced, by the importing so much Spanish. The sort the country is said to be chiefly overstock'd with, is the very large Lincolnshire, and such as resembles it in other parts, as the Peak-lime-stone; tho' perhaps not so much so as is imagined. It is indeed true, that this sort of wool is much fallen from what it was a few years back, but at the same time, it ought to be remembered, how much it had risen a few preceding years, much beyond what trade was able to bear; and even now it is not so much lower than it was preceding that rise. The advance of the produce of the land occasioned the land owners to raise their rents, not considering that such rise might be only temporary, and having received the advance rents for a few years, it is thought a grievance to reduce them.

A few indeed have set the *noble example*; would to God it was more generally followed! Then there would be less occasion to propose means to keep up the price of wool. Perhaps a few years more may do it without risking our trade by the mode proposed—that of *exporting it*. There is not the least fear of it's being done in the common course. Could we once have a peace, a good trade would soon diminish our stock of *wool*. As we have plenty of materials, so we have hands to manufacture it, many of whom lie idle for want of employment, and many are compelled to go for soldiers. Peace would put a stop to the recruiting service. If we had a demand for goods every nerve would be strained.

Another cause of increasing the stock of *wool*, has been the several fortunate years amongst the sheep, very few having died of the *rot*, a distemper which often carries off one third or more in a year, and for any thing we know to the contrary it may be the case this year, and succeeding ones. In the fragments of the pamphlet I before quoted it is wrote,

“ *When Wool and Corn abound in growers hand,
Store up, lest rot or famine seize the land;
And Britons want what once they could command.* ”

The farmers, tho' the price of wool has fallen, have been gainers upon the whole by losing so few sheep; if the price is lower'd one half, they have had one third more to shear, and had the sheep into bargain, which are of infinitely more value. The respectable author I mentioned at the beginning of my letter, according to a quotation in a London Paper, asserts that the same argument for exporting *corn*, holds good with respect to *wool*, a proposition I by no means agree to; *corn* being nearly at the summit of perfection and wool not so. The latter admits of employment to incredible numbers, and the former to none or next to none. Nor are they upon a par, till the *wool* is manufactured; then the comparison will agree exactly, and it would be as absurd to forbid the exporting so much of those manufactured goods as we cannot consume, as it would be to refuse exporting so much corn, as we have no occasion for. He likewise says, that by allowing wool to be exported, smuggling will be prevented, and an immense revenue accrue to the state.—But it seems to me far more likely to be prevented by being entirely prohibited, as is now done by many laws framed by the wisdom of our ancestors. And I can hardly help thinking a smuggling vessel, loaded with British wool is almost as rare as a Phoenix. The notion of wool being smuggled, exists, in my opinion, only in idea. The article cannot by any means be compressed into a little room, but will always betray itself, and to smuggle it in small quantities, would not pay any body for the trouble and risk: if it is allowed to be exported it may be smuggled with much less danger. An outward bound vessel loaded with wool would be no longer a *novelty*, and if met at sea, would be supposed to have paid duty; whereas the case is now different,—an intire prohibition is known, and consequently the bare sight of such loading, must create suspicion, and occasion a discovery. The author of the pamphlet has something so full upon this topic, and which so intirely coincides with my own ideas,

ideas, that I shall quote it. He remarks " that the legal
 " exportation of fleece, skin, or combed wool, of worsted,
 " or woollen yarn, on payment of a duty will, instead of
 " lessening the temptation of smuggling, greatly increase it,
 " and notwithstanding any arguments to the contrary, will
 " give greater opportunity to smugglers to run it, than
 " possibly could be had under a prohibition."

" He who affirms, *that if the prohibition was removed,*
and a subsidy charged upon the exporting of wool, it might
be the easier retained at home at pleasure, or rendered
so dear to foreigners, that we might have sufficient advan-
tages over them in the manufacture, must maintain, that
 " officers of the customs, will be more diligent in collecting
 " the duties so to be charg'd, than they were to make seizures
 " of the article by virtue of a prohibition, tho' they had even
 " a MOIETY of the whole; or that the exporters will be
 " more conscientious in paying the duties, than they were
 " in obeying the laws, tho' they hazarded their lives and
 " fortune into the bargain; or that foreigners would be
 " less desirous of *wool*, after the repeal than before.

" The subsidy must either be little or much; if the latter,
 " it may be worth venturing to save payment, or if the first,
 " FOREIGNERS will have the advantage over us in cheap
 " labour, and even that will more than counterbalance the
 " good to be reap'd by this scheme."

" The legal exportation of wool will most certainly give
 " greater opportunities for an illicit one; both will soon
 " ruin the *manufacturers* and afterwards the growers." If
 what Chambers's Dictionary says be true, he informs us,
 " that the wool of England has always been in the highest
 " repute abroad, that the French can make no good cloth
 " of their own wool, without at least one third of English
 " wool mixed with it " the consequence will be, that three
 packs of manufactur'd goods will be sent to market against

us for every pack we export." He further remarks, "that
 " in the reign of Queen Elizabeth the exportation of wool
 " was absolutely prohibited, and from that time England
 " has been exceeding jealous of it's wool; to promote their
 " vigilance, the judges, king, council at law, the masters in
 " chancery in parliament, are all seated on WOOL-PACKS
 " and scarce a parliament but has renew'd, and reinforced
 " the prohibition."

Should the exportation occasion a few years hence the fall
 of wool still lower, as is reasonable enough to suppose, "then
 " landlords must abate their rents, or take their land into
 " their own hands; on the contrary a true emulation among
 " our manufacturers of our own wool will employ numbers
 " of people, keep numbers together, increase the consumption
 " of our produce, occasion a quick circulation of money a-
 " mong persons of all ranks, keep up the price of *wool*, and
 " consequently the value of land. It is an acknowledg'd
 " truth, that the riches of our NATION arise, more from
 " the labour of the *people* than from the exportation of raw
 " commodities."

" The experiment may be extremely dangerous, for
 " whenever the spirit of trade is unjustly curb'd; and when
 " home manufactures become interrupted by FOREIGNERS
 " in the purchase of materials for work, or any ways distress-
 " ed, the genius of the people may be diverted from labour
 " and industry, perhaps disloyal and injurious sentiments pre-
 " vail, from a sense of what they imagine is wrong." And the
 ingenious author of the pamphlet on the utility of machines
 for shortening labour, justly observes that " when the lower
 " kind of people feel, or apprehend they feel, evils, they have
 " not always the happiest method of redressing them." It
 " is dangerous to export raw materials, for by so doing,
 " we transfer the manufacture itself, together with the
 " manufacturers, to foreign parts, the industrious wanting
 " employment at home will follow the materials abroad."

And

And as the great Locke judiciously observes “when **TRADE** is once lost, it will be too late by a mis-timed care easily to retrieve it; the currents of trade like those of water make themselves channels out of which if they are once diverted it will be hard to return them.” May the parliament, pay attention to so excellent a maxim, and not run the risk of losing a manufacture by an ill judg’d supposition of raising the materials.”

“Sure I am that in the exportation of wool, we risk a home market for a chance of one abroad. It cannot be good policy to send out of the nation, any improveable commodity before it is improved, when doing it must employ a number of our own people and tend to turn the balance of trade in our favour.” That exporting wool may be hurtful to our manufacturing will not bear a moment’s dispute. We will suppose that I have wool and my neighbour none, but is therefore necessitated to buy his cloth of me.—Allow him half my wool, and then he will make it himself and be no longer a customer; but is the consumption increased thereby? and if it is exported will the ultimate consumption be increased? and the case is worse if one pack of ours will work two up of our neighbours, which is not so workable without it. By this there is more than a probability that the channel of foreign commerce may in that case be turn’d against us, to our manifold disadvantage. The evil consequences are too certain, nor can the gain proposed be in any **MEASURE ADEQUATE** to the danger. But after all where would you export it? not to America? to France? to Spain? to Holland? we are at war with them all! and alas! that may be in some part the melancholy cause of our having occasion to have recourse to the expedient. Let us have a little patience and despond not. A few years (could we have a peace) may remove the evil without any risk. That peace may be again restored is the ardent desire of every man who wishes well to this country.

The

The importing Irish yarn seems a measure the Lincolnshire gentlemen wish to explode. How far that may be hurtful or beneficial on the whole, I cannot pretend to determine; but, while they were confined to the linen branch, we were in duty bound to take their wool, or yarn; and under the present free trade of Ireland it can be no bad policy to import her materials in the woollen line, as it may keep that nation from turning their thoughts to that manufacture.

Our ancestors were, as I have before observed, extremely careful of keeping the woollen trade to this nation; a stronger instance of which, we cannot have, than their prohibiting a *sister nation* under the same government, when interests ought to be mutual, from sharing with us. This might be carrying matters too far; but however, the proposed remedy of exporting it, is going much further in the other extreme, as well as reversing the wisdom of our ancestors, who I am apt to think, had full as good notions of trade, and understood the interest of the nation full as well, as the present generation, if not better. Nature and providence have been liberal in bestowing wool in such abundance, and if we value their favours aright, we shall study to preserve the blessing. Those who assert, that the late surprising inventions in the manufacture of a foreign article, are of utility to trade, would not hesitate to say the introducing similar machines into the wool would be still more so; but it is a measure, which will hardly obtain the concurrence of the working part of the people. And indeed the arguments which may be urged for making use of them in the cotton trade, will not altogether hold good in wool. In the woollen, we either have, or ought to have, none or but few competitors, by being possessors of the raw materials, and having them produced in our own country; but the cotton is free to other nations, who may import the same as well as we, and whom we must either excel in point of quality, or cheapness, or have them as rivals in our export trade: hence every
ingenuity

ingenuity may be needful to gain ourselves the preference; and
 that the machines lately made use of, have in a great mea-
 sure effected it, we might be led to believe from the demand
 in that line. I must once again observe, it has been greatly
 to the prejudice of our *wool* trade. Should we set about
 sending the latter out of the kingdom in it's raw, and unim-
 proved state, then the same means may become necessary
 to preserve our connections, as I before observed, many
 other nations manufacture much lower than us; and by
 having our materials without some such helps as machines,
 would soon beat us out at foreign markets. May we never
 be so infatuated as to try the experiment? As the over stock
 is chiefly of the large Lincolnshire sort, and as fine wool is
 very scarce, and we never at any time have enough of it;
 would it not be better to encourage by premiums, or other-
 wise, the growth of fine wool? This, and long wool, are
 two distinct articles, and used for different purposes: the
 former, in the composition of cloth, and the latter, for lighter
 goods; such as shalloons, tammies, &c. As the case is now,
 we may be fairly said to have but one sort, the disproportion
 being so great; but by encouraging the growth of fine, the
 quantity of the long would be lessened, and the proportion
 more equal; and of the finer sort, we could not possibly
 have too much.—“ By striving to find out all possible means
 of raising a finer sort within the British dominions, it
 would be less in the power of any Foreign State to dis-
 tress us by prohibiting it's exportation from their respective
 countries,”—and would be greatly to the emolument of
 the land owners, farmers, woolstaplers, &c. as well as the
 whole kingdom, by saving so much money from going out
 of the nation, as must have bought the same quantity of fine
 foreign wool. But as fine wool weighs so light, it can hardly
 ever be expected, that the farmer should be patriotic enough
 to grow it without an adequate encouragement, either in
 the price or by way of reward.

To increase the consumption, let us set the example at once. Let the wear of goods manufactured from wool (which is capable of making articles as curious and as costly as silk*) be preferred to those made of a foreign article. Make it the fashion and it is done at once.—“ Let a vein of parsimony “ (says the author of the pamphlet before quoted) be introduced throughout the whole country, in all wearable “ things not the native growth of Great-Britain, or “ Ireland;”—let us fix a resolution to wear woollens more and more, and other things less.

And (according to *The British Merchant* †) ‘ Domestic trade is of far greater consequence than is generally imagined. A large consumption of home produce is a certain advantage;’ and that it might be greatly increased in the woollen line, is universally known.

To sum up all; (as the writer of the pamphlet quoted from some other) ‘ if without English, or Irish wools, there can be no quantity of *fine worsted stuffs, fine worsted stockings, nor a middle sort of cloth made*;—if without English, or Irish wools, foreigners cannot make a tolerable piece of drapery, nor neat woollen goods, without a mixture of one of them;—then it is *undoubtedly our Interest* to keep it at home, which will in some measure insure us a market for its manufactured goods abroad. But if, on the contrary, wool abounds in other countries of Europe as well as here—‘ if other nations neither want the art nor materials;—‘ if they can make as *saleable woollen goods as we*, without any or a *mixture of British, or Irish wool*; then it will be to little purpose to repeal the laws which prohibit its ex-

* During the late war, the magistrates of Aberdeen desirous of paying some tribute to the great merit of MARSHAL KEITH, their townsman, procured a pair of large men’s worsted stockings made of Highland wool, which, though the staple thereof was FOUR THREADS, were yet spun of so extraordinary a fineness, that one of them was actually drawn through a thumb ring. Their value was found to be not less than 3 guineas.

† A book under that title, “ quoted in the pamphlet.”

portation; for can it be supposed, other nations will pay duty, freights, &c. for what they do not want; and if they do want, it must be our interest, as a manufacturing nation (to use a common expression) *to let want be their master.*

Spain, (it is observed by an author) has conquered "her prejudices," and exports her wool, to the great increase of her revenue. But let a different policy actuate us; and let us send out no improveable commodity, in it's *unimproved* state.

If the few hints contained in this letter, (which I submit to your consideration with the utmost diffidence) should in any measure help to support the great *cause of the nation*, which you with a *laudable spirit* have espoused; (and it is published with no other view) or rouse up an abler writer in support of it, I shall be very happy. Perhaps I may be censured by some as having a narrow mind, and I ingenuously confess; —if to act from principle without the most distant selfish views; —if to bear a mind fraught with the sincerest wishes for the prosperity and trade of my country is the characteristic of *one*, then it is *second to none*. And I can with equal truth assert, that this little production has not the most distant design to promote or serve a *party purpose*; on the contrary, that all ranks of people may unite and concur in promoting the true *Interest of GREAT-BRITAIN*, is the *sincere wish* of

THE AUTHOR.

F I N I S.



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February 9th, 1782.

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